

# Machel's prisons — rape, brutality and starvation

Four-and-a-half months of horror in a Mozambique penitentiary on trumped-up charges have not dampened the admiration Portuguese national António Malaquias de Lemos professes to feel for President Samora Machel's Marxist regime. After his recent release from detention, he described in Lisbon the "sub-human" conditions in which prisoners are held but said he hopes and prays Mozambique under Frelimo may occupy "a top place among the civilised countries of the world".

Lemos recounts how prisoners are starved, tortured and subjected to the most abject indignities. Women are brutally beaten up and raped and insane prisoners are kept in communal cells with other detainees. When the prison warders decide "to calm them down", other prisoners have to share in the beatings.

While the Portuguese were still ruling Mozambique, Lisbon-born Lemos (43), an obscure solicitor in the city of Beira, supplemented his income by giving lessons in a local technical school. When Frelimo took over he became a fanatical supporter of the new regime and was suitably rewarded with the chairmanship of the board of directors of the Búzi Sugar Company across the river from Beira.

He was arrested and thrown into prison when an anonymous police informer reported him for "fomenting divisionism among the working masses and showing disrespect for the government and the Frelimo party". Nobody bothered to check the accusations.

After four and a half months in the infamous Machava penitentiary, a warder casually opened the cell door and said: "Pack up and get

out". Says Lemos: "Not even this shook in any way my political beliefs."

Lemos expresses the hope that his damning evidence will be interpreted in a constructive light, claiming that his action is not "an imperialist manoeuvre or a personal vendetta" and proclaiming his revolutionary ideals by saying, "I always endeavoured to protect the interests of the working masses."

He believes that the Frelimo leadership is possibly not aware of the monstrous violations of human rights taking place, ordered by whoever has the power to see that "revolutionary justice" is done.

He thinks he is rendering the Marxist leaders a service when he says: "Nationals and foreigners are arrested without any charges being brought against them simply on reports of anonymous informers, often for puerile reasons. This creates an atmosphere of instability, worry and fear."

Lemos quotes some examples. Moved by jealousy a woman reported to the police that her husband was having an affair with a Portuguese married woman with whom he planned to elope. The man was jailed for two years.

Two men released with him spent eight months at Machava after the police received an anonymous report that they were planning to hijack a light plane from the Maputo Flying Club. They were at a pavement cafe when a police informer overheard them talking about flying.

Lemos refers to poison-pen letters, anonymous telephone calls to the police and the reports made by officials to incriminate colleagues they dislike.

On conditions in the prisons he says: "Prisoners are subjected to the brutality of warders and kept under constant harassment. Food is scarce and badly cooked and sometimes prisoners do not eat for days. Medicines are in short supply and there is only one medical orderly for the whole prison" (estimated to hold more than 1 600 prisoners).

There is no recreation. To relieve themselves prisoners have to wait for hours until a warder condescends to open the cell door.

"Life is so horrible and so offensive to human dignity that many inmates go insane in the pavilions where men and women are held together. Demented detainees are beaten up with pieces of hose until they collapse."

A favourite form of torture at Machava is to pour water into the cells to keep the occupant from resting until the floor and walls are dry. Another routine punishment is to flood the toilets, undress the detainee, dump him into water and keep him locked inside for long hours.

The plight of women prisoners is even more appalling. In Lemos's own pavilion a woman was raped by a warder and a Portuguese woman was beaten up, knocked to the floor and brutally kicked. Another detainee, a Swazi woman who showed signs of insanity, spent long periods locked in a toilet and had her meals there.

One of the worst torments for prisoners is to be kept wondering how long they are going to be held. They do not know whether they have been tried and sentenced as they are not required to appear before the courts.

After his release Lemos heard that the new death penalty law had been made retroactive. "This is an aberration in the light of the law in civilised countries. The trial of the people recently shot by firing squad (23 so far) was a gross miscarriage of justice."

In the case of Portuguese national Luis Manuel Nunes da Silva, Lemos recalls that he was executed for crimes allegedly committed more than three years ago. He was not allowed consular assistance nor to appeal.

Lemos claims that Silva was executed 48 hours after a revolutionary court was set up. "I can imagine the anxiety of people who are living from day to day in the knowledge that at any moment they may be told they are to face a firing squad or sentenced to prison terms of up to 30 years."

Despite his own ordeal and the tragic situation of those left behind at Machava, Lemos apparently still hopes his protestations of devotion to the Marxist-Leninist credo may strike a responsive chord in the hearts of the Frelimo leaders and a new, well-paid chairmanship may be offered him.

Machel: 'No clemency. The enemy must be destroyed'

